

# PARADISE



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"Why have you come back so far? Why again?"

"I want to know what happened."

"What happened when?"

"Do you want to know of the mutation of mankind, of the silent King who transformed every man, woman and child on the planet into an Inhuman?"

"Or do you want to know about the war that was fought over who the population of Earth will be — mutant or human?"

"Or do you want to know the origins of alternate realities and why they diverge? You come from one, after all, Major Astro."

"We want to know *everything*, robot."

"How did you find out about what's happened to Earth now? You live in the 31st Century."

"But I live *here*, as well... don't I, X-51?"

"I'm afraid you don't, Major. Not anymore. Vance Astro is dead."

# PARADISE X

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## I S S U E 1

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"YOU KNOW THAT VANCE ASTRO, THE AVENGER KNOWN AS JUSTICE, IS DEAD ALREADY, DON'T YOU? AND IT MAY HAVE BEEN YOUR FAULT. WHAT IS YOUR GAME, MAJOR ASTRO?"

"YOU TELL ME, ROBOT."

"WHEN YOU GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY FIRST CAME TO EARTH, YOU MET YOURSELF AND TOLD YOUNG VANCE OF THE DARK FUTURE YOU CAME FROM... A FUTURE WHERE MANKIND HAD BEEN ENSLAVED BY AN ALIEN RACE KNOWN AS THE BADOON."

"EVENTUALLY DOCTOR STRANGE WIPED YOUNG VANCE'S MIND OF YOUR MEETING AND OF HIS POSSIBLE DESTINY. BUT HE DIDN'T ERASE THE KNOWLEDGE OF YOUR ALTERNATE SELF."

"NOR DID HE AFFECT THE DISSATISFACTION OF YOUR LIFE AS A MEMBER OF THE GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY."

"AND WHILE THE DEFENDERS TRAVELED TO YOUR FUTURE THROUGH DOCTOR STRANGE'S MAGICS AND HELPED YOU GAIN A DECISIVE VICTORY OVER THE BADOON, YOU NEVER FORGOT YOUR MEETING WITH YOURSELF."

"YOU NEVER FORGOT EVERYTHING YOU LOST ON EARTH WHEN YOUR MISSION IN SPACE WENT AWRY AND YOUR BODY WAS PLUNGED INTO SUSPENDED ANIMATION."

"YOU AWOKE INTO A WAR...AND A SITUATION YOU WOULD DO ANYTHING TO ESCAPE."

"EVEN IF THAT MEANT DYING A LITTLE SO YOU COULD CONTINUE LIVING ON EARTH."

"WHAT'S THE ROBOT SAYING, MAJOR?"

"NOTHING, CHARLIE. SHUT UP."

"AND WHEN THE SUPERCOMPUTER KORYAC TRAVELED BACK IN TIME TO KILL YOU AT AN EARLIER AGE, YOU MADE CERTAIN HE DIDN'T. BUT THAT WASN'T ENOUGH."

"YOU COULD HAVE RETURNED TO YOUR NEWLY ADOPTED ERA AT THAT TIME..."

"...BUT YOU DIDN'T."


"YOU WANTED TO LEAVE SOMETHING OF YOURSELF TO REMEMBER THIS WORLD BY."

"EVERYONE THOUGHT THAT THIS MEETING--THE SECOND, THOUGH YOUNG VANCE DIDN'T KNOW IT--AWAKENED THE PSYCHIC ABILITIES WITHIN HIM."

"BUT INSTEAD, YOU PASSED ON PART OF YOUR MENTAL PSI POWER TO HIM."

"YOU CREATED A PSYCHIC RAPPORT FOR YOURSELF AND LEFT EVERYONE ON EARTH TO BELIEVE ITS ORIGINS WERE FROM WITHIN VANCE HIMSELF."





"BUT IT WASN'T VANCE WHO HAD THE PSI ABILITY  
IT WAS *YOU*. THAT'S WHY HE WAS NEVER AS  
*POWERFUL* AS YOU, MAJOR ASTRO.

"YOU *USED* HIM AND *MANIPULATED*  
YOURSELF BY MAKING YOURSELF A HERO,  
AS LEADER OF THE NEW WARRIORS AND  
LATER, A MEMBER OF THE AVENGERS.

"PERHAPS THIS IN ITSELF WAS  
THE REASON VANCE CHOSE  
TO CALL HIMSELF *JUSTICE*.



"BECAUSE THIS WAS THE  
VERY NOTION THAT HAD  
BEEN *DENIED* HIM."

"HOW DID  
I DIE?"

"THERE WAS A *BOY*...THE SON OF THE HERO COMET MAN,  
WHO HAD A *TERRIBLE POWER* TRIGGERED WITHIN HIM.

"THIS BOY WOULD LATER BE  
KNOWN AS *THE SKULL*.

"WHEN THE POWER TO CONTROL THE *MOTOR  
CONTROLS* OF EVERY BEING ON THE PLANET  
WAS BORN WITHIN HIM, EVERY PSYCHIC ON  
EARTH WAS *INSTANTLY* OVERWHELMED AND  
DIED IN CARDIAC ARREST."

"YOU CAN'T  
BLAME *ME*  
FOR THAT."

"THE POWER YOU LEFT WITH VANCE KEPT  
HIS OWN UNMUTATED SEED *DORMANT*,  
MAJOR, THERE ARE NO GUARANTEES  
HE WOULD HAVE EVEN *HAD* PSYCHIC  
ABILITIES.

"YOU AS GOOD AS COMMITTED  
*SUICIDE*, MAJOR, AND FOR THAT,  
JUSTICE IS *DEAD* NOW."





NOW WHY  
DON'T YOU TELL  
ME WHY YOU'RE  
REALLY  
HERE?

DON'T  
LOOK AT ME  
LIKE THAT.

YOU  
KNOW I CAN'T  
BE BLAMED FOR  
THIS.



WHY  
SHOULDN'T YOU  
BE BLAMED?

MAJOR?

I THINK  
WE'VE LEARNED  
ALL WE CAN FROM  
THE ROBOT.



IF THIS  
STARTED WITH  
THE *INHUMAN'S*  
MUTATING THE  
WORLD, WE GO TO  
THEIR *HIDDEN*  
CITY NEXT.

READY  
THE SHIP  
MARTINEK.



WHAT  
DID YOU TELL  
THEM?



YOU  
KNOW WHAT  
I SAID. I WILL  
NOT HIDE THE  
TRUTH AS  
HATHU DID.

"A LANDING WE CAN WALK AWAY  
FROM THIS TIME, MARTINEX."

"YES, MAJOR."

MAJOR,  
WE AREN'T  
ALONE.

SEE WHAT  
YOU CAN SEE  
FROM THE AIR,  
STARHAWK.

I  
DON'T THINK  
SO.

MARTINEX?  
CHARLIE?

MAJOR?  
WHAT'S HAPPEN-  
ING?


YOU  
ARE ALL SO  
OBVIOUS.

YOU  
WEAR WEAKNESSES LIKE  
PROPAGANDA.


I AM KARNAK,  
LOYAL SERVANT OF  
THE DEAD KING OF  
THE INHUMANS.

YOU  
ARE NOT  
WELCOME  
HERE.






"AND I THINK THE PHRASE  
YOU'RE LOOKING FOR IS  
'HEAVEN HELP US.'"




WHAT  
DO YOU SEE,  
MATTHEW?



I DON'T  
KNOW, STEVE... I  
THINK I SEE THAT  
HEAVEN IS WHAT  
YOU WANT IT  
TO BE.

IT'S  
OURS FOR THE  
WISHING.




"JOHNNY STORM NOW HAS AN  
ETERNITY WITHOUT RESPONSIBILITY.

"THERE IS NO DOCTOR DOOM THERE. NO  
SKRULL INVASION. NO MOLE MAN. AND  
NO FANTASTIC FOUR FLARE BECKONING  
IN THE SKY TO BREAK UP HIS AFFAIRS.


"THERE IS NO OLDER SISTER TO MEASURE  
UP TO. THERE IS NO BEN GRIMM TO BE  
EMBARRASSED BY. NO REED RICHARDS TO  
POINT OUT THE NEEDS OF THE KNOWN AND  
THE UNKNOWN UNIVERSE.

"HE CAN LIVE FOREVER IN  
IGNORANCE OF HIS FELLOW MAN'S  
NEEDS. AND SEE ONLY HIS OWN.



"FOR JOHNNY BLAZE,  
PARADISE IS NOT A  
CHOICE OF IDEALIZED  
PLEASURE. IT'S MORE  
LIKE PURGATORY.

"FOR BLAZE,  
THERE IS A  
HIGHWAY  
BETWEEN  
HEAVEN AND  
HELL.



"BUT I'M NOT CERTAIN  
JOHNNY KNOWS WHICH  
DIRECTION HE'S  
GOING IN. THIS, TOO,  
MAY BE HIS DECISION.

"FOR THE BROTHER OF BLACK  
BOLT, MAXIMUS, IS KING OF  
THE INHUMANS AND REIGNS  
WITH WISDOM AND INNER  
STRENGTH.

"HIS RATIONALITY HAS BEEN  
COMPLETELY RESTORED. AND HE  
LEADS IN LOVE AS HE COULD  
NEVER DO IN LIFE.

"THERE IS NO  
COSMIC SCREAM  
TO ROB HIM OF  
HIS RATIONALE."





WHAT OF JIM BARNES?

JIM BARNES?

"JIM BARNES...YOUR OLD PARTNER, BUCKY, IS--"



"YES? JIM WAS ALWAYS HIS OWN MAN. I CAN'T WAIT TO HEAR WHAT DO YOU SEE?"

"HE'S...HAPPY, STEVE. MAYBE THAT'S ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW."



THAT'S GOOD.

IT'S STRANGE, THESE WISHES... APART FROM BUCKY, THEY SEEM SO ANCHORED IN OUR PREVIOUS LIVES, NOT LIKE THE HEAVEN I'D HOPED FOR AT ALL.

THEY ARE ONLY DREAMS, THEN, THAT THEY LIVE. THEY ARE ASLEEP.



NO, THEY HAVE EACH CREATED DIFFERENT REALITIES THROUGH THE PIECES OF THE COSMIC CUBE EACH HAS CONSUMED.

EACH IS AS REAL AS THE WORLD WE CAME FROM WITH ONE EXCEPTION.

THE INHABITANTS OF EACH OF THEIR WORLDS EXIST ONLY BECAUSE THE CREATORS AND DREAMERS LOOK FOR THEM THERE.



MY BROTHER IS SANE...AND HE IS KING.

THERE'S NO NEED TO REGRET THE PAST, BOLT. IT'S NOT OUR JOB TO JUDGE THE WANTS OF THOSE WHO COME TO THE PARADISE... FOR GOOD OR BAD.

AFTER ALL, HOW CAN THERE BE ANYTHING BAD HERE?





IN LIFE, MURDOCK WAS *BLIND* HERE, HE SEES MORE THAN MOST OF US CAN. PERHAPS THAT IS WHY HE DOESN'T HAVE *WINGS*.

I HAVE ONCE AGAIN RETURNED TO THE *HOLDING PLACE* OF THE DEAD WHERE SOULS INCAPABLE OF ACCEPTING THEIR DEATH NOW LIVE AS THEY ONCE DID, REPEATING THE HISTORIES THAT HAD MEANING ONLY IN A CONTEXT OF *MORTALITY*.

I AM BEGINNING TO WONDER HOW MUCH A STEP FORWARD THE *PARADISE* IS FROM THIS?

OUR CALL IS TO BRING THESE PEOPLE TO THE *PARADISE* WHERE THEIR DREAMS MIGHT BECOME *REAL*, WHERE THESE PHANTOM MEMORIES MIGHT FINALLY RESOLVE THEMSELVES IN THE LIVES THESE PEOPLE HAVE *ALWAYS WANTED*...BUT NOW I DON'T KNOW.

MY PARENTS ARE NOT THE *ONLY* SOULS I'M COMMISSIONED TO BRING INTO THE HEAVEN.

FRANK? FRANK, DO YOU *KNOW* THAT MAN?

EARTH TO OFFICER CASTLE.

FRANK.

NO, I CAN'T PLACE HIM, AND IT'S DRIVING ME *CRAZY*.

FRANK, IT'S YOUR DAY OFF. YOU *PROMISED*.

IT'S JUST I FEEL I *SHOULD* KNOW HIM, BUT I DON'T. WHAT GOOD ARE THESE INSTINCTS IF I CAN'T--

STOP PUNISHING YOURSELF.



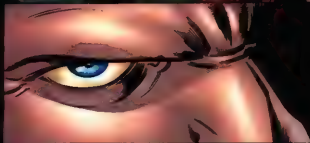


THERE  
HE IS WE  
WOULDN'T BE HERE  
IF IT WEREN'T FOR  
CASTLE.

SPEAK FOR  
YOURSELVES. MURDOCK  
KILLED ME WITH THE LAW, EVEN  
AFTER I KILLED HIM AND  
FRAMED IT ON THE WITCH,  
ELEKTRA.



AND THERE HE  
STOOD, WANTING TO OFFER  
ME ETERNAL LIFE...WANTING  
TO BE THE AMBASSADOR  
OF ALL I DESIRE



AS IF  
ALL COULD BE  
FORGIVEN IN  
HEAVEN



YOU KNOW  
WHAT I JUST THOUGHT  
OFF?

WHAT?

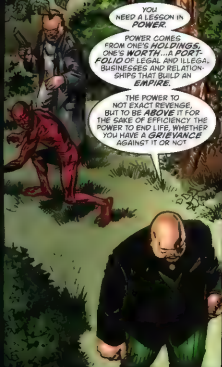


CASTLE  
CAN'T KILL US  
HERE



LET'S  
LET HIM  
THINK HE  
CAN





"SCOTT? SCOTT, ARE YOU AND THE REST OF THE X-MEN STILL WITH REED RICHARDS IN LATVERIA?"

"YES, JEAN."

"...WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE PARADISE?"

"IT'S DIFFICULT, SCOTT. THE IDEA OF EVERYONE GETTING WHAT THEY WANT IN THIS HEAVEN SOUNDS GREAT IN PRINCIPLE...BUT THEN YOU SEE IT, AND YOU WONDER WHERE WE ALL WENT *WRONG*."

THREE WEEKS  
O' THIS. *THREE*  
WEEKS.

AN' YA WANT  
TA KNOW WHAT STINKS  
THE *MOST* ABOUT IT?  
OTHERN HULK'S DIAPER.  
I MEAN

NO ONE'S  
EVEN *WATCHIN'* TA  
SEE WHICH OF US  
IS STRONGER.

IT'S LIKE  
*NOBODY CARES*  
ABOUT ANSWERING THE  
BIG QUESTIONS  
ANYMORE

TRUTH IS,  
JADE-JAWS, WE'RE  
OUT HERE SO WE DON'T  
MAKE IT ANY *HARDER*  
ON ANYBODY IN  
THE CASTLE

I'VE NEVER FELT SO *POWER-  
LESS* BEFORE IN MY LIFE, JEAN

"THE CASTLE'S BEEN TURNED  
INTO A *HOSPITAL*."

"GOD'S WAITING  
ROOM IS MORE...*XE*  
T' EXCEPT GOD'S  
GONE FISHING

"WE JUST NEVER REALIZED  
HOW *LUCKY* WE WERE TO  
HAVE DEATH BE A PART OF  
THE WORLD. SOMETIMES I  
WISH MAR-VELL HAD NEVER--"

"I KNOW SCOTT. WHAT ABOUT  
THE *BOY* MAR-VELL?"



"HE'S DIFFERENT NOW. LESS CONFIDENT. I DON'T THINK THE BATTLE AGAINST DEATH WENT THE WAY HE'D EXPECTED."

"AND NOW THAT THE REST OF THE WORLD IS GUFFERING, EVERYONE **BLAMES HIM**."

"I AM **CUT OFF** FROM MY OTHER SELF, REED. I HAVE NO IDEA WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE PARADISE."

"I KNOW, MAR-VELL. WE'VE ALL BEEN **CUT OFF**."

"I'VE ATTEMPTED TO CONTACT **GENIS**, THE SON OF MAR-VELL, BUT I CAN'T FIND HIM ANYWHERE. I HAVEN'T SEEN HIM FOR YEARS."

THERE WAS NO **GENIS**, REED. ONLY **RICK JONES**. **GENIS** WAS JUST ANOTHER FIGMENT OF **RICK JONES'** MUTATION.

THE KREE-SKRULL WAR, THE WAR AT THE END OF TIME WITH THE TIME-LOST AVENGERS. **GENIS**.

THE **SUPREME INTELLIGENCE** TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THIS TIME AND TIME AGAIN.

"I WAS **RICK** ALL THE TIME. AND WITH **RICK** DEAD, SO ARE ALL THE HEROES. HE COULD **CREATE** TO SAVE THE DAY."

**JONES** WAS JUST SO **CONVINCED** THAT HE COULD NEVER REALLY HAVE ANY POWER, AND NEVER ACCEPTED THE FACT THAT HE HAD THE ABILITY TO **CREATE** HEROES OUT OF HIS MIND.





I'LL  
BE GLAD  
WHEN WE CAN  
TAKE CARE OF  
YOUR WISH,  
ORORO

EVERY  
TIME YOU GET  
HUNGRY, MY  
MUTANT HEALING  
FACTOR GETS A  
KILLER WORK-  
OUT

IT'S  
HARD TO  
BELIEVE MY  
DAD LIVES  
THERE

NOT  
A PERSON  
THERE THAT  
ISN'T WALKING  
ON WALLS  
NOW.

GHUT  
UP, 'PUTER  
IT WAS A  
JOKE



HEY!  
THAT'S MY  
DAD!

AND  
VENOM'S  
RIGHT BEHIND  
HIM!



HURRY!



LEAVE  
MY DAD ALONE, YOU  
MONSTER!!

WHOSE  
DAD?!

MY  
DAD?!




JUST ONCE  
HE KNOW... JUST  
ONCE

SHUT UP  
PUTER, HE RECOG  
NIZES US. I'LL  
EXPLAIN..

I THINK  
I'VE BEEN AT THIS  
LONG ENOUGH TO  
KNOW WHAT'S GOING  
ON





DON'T BOTHER TO TELL ME...THAT'S SPIDER-GIRL OR SPIDIA OR THE AMAZING WEBBED WONDERBRA AND SHE'S ACTUALLY MY DAUGHTER FROM ANOTHER REALITY AND SHE'S TRYING TO SAVE ME FROM VENOM...WHO SHE HASN'T REALIZED YET IS ALSO MY DAUGHTER...AND THIS WHOLE BATTLE IS GOING TO TURN INTO A BIG MIS-UNDERSTANDING AND THEN THEY'LL HUG AND CRY AND CARRY ON ABOUT HOW MUCH THEY ALWAYS WANTED TO BE TWIN SISTERS ALL THEIR LIVES...RIGHT?

AN THE WORST OF IT IS, AFTER ALL THIS IS OVER, THEY'LL BOTH COME AND LIVE WITH ME



DOC OCK, I COULD FIGHT. GIVE ME THE LIZARD, I COULD FIGHT HIM WITH ONE ARM, WHICH IS REALLY KIND OF AN INSIDE JOKE. GIVE ME THE HYPNO HUSTLER FOR CRIPE'S SAKE

BUT ANOTHER DAUGHTER?

I THINK I'D RATHER KISS J. JONAH JAMESON! WAIT A MINUTE BEEN THERE, DONE THAT.

THIS IS ALL BECAUSE I BROKE BETTY'S HEART, ISN'T IT, GOD? THIS IS YOUR UNIVERSAL JUSTICE? YOU PUT A POX UPON MY...HRPH!



"YOU ARE GOING TO BE **QUEEN OF ENGLAND**, MEDUSA. AREN'T YOU EXCITED?"



I DON'T KNOW, CHILD...THIS IS A **POLITICAL MARRIAGE**.

STILL, THE GENTILITY I SEE IN MY SON DID NOT COME FROM BLACK BOLT, THE BOY'S FATHER, BUT FROM BRIAN BRADDOCK—**KING BRITAIN**.



I FEAR THAT THIS AFFECTION I'M FEELING FOR BRADDOCK IS A **BETRAYAL** OF BOLT...AND OF THE **INHUMAN NATION**.



BUT MEDUSA, EVEN YOUR **SON** IS IN FAVOR OF THIS MARRIAGE.



HE SEES WHAT THE REST OF US DO. THIS IS **RIGHT**. IT'S **MORE** THAN MERELY A JOINING OF ENGLAND AND THE **INHUMAN NATION**.


THIS IS **RIGHT**.





THIS IS ABOUT **PEACE**.  
MORE AND MORE  
OF THE INHUMAN  
NATION ARE  
ARRIVING EVERY  
DAY

THERE  
ARE NOW **IRON  
AVENGERS** ON  
EVERY MAJOR  
CONTINENT IN  
THE WORLD!



"THERE ARE **GOOD THINGS**  
HAPPENING, MEDUSA. YOU DON'T  
HAVE TO FEEL **GUILTY** IF THEY  
HAPPEN TO YOU "



AND WHAT  
ABOUT YOU,  
LUNA?

ARE GOOD  
THINGS HAPPENING  
TO YOU?



"MAYBE "



WHAT  
ABOUT KING  
BRIAN? IS HE  
STILL GRIPPED  
WITH **SAD-  
NESS?**



HE FEELS  
MORE THAN WE WERE  
ALLOWED TO AS  
INHUMANS...

...UNLIKE MY  
HUSBAND, HE MUST  
LIVE WITH THE KNOWLEDGE  
THAT NOT EVERY DECISION  
HE MAKES IS THE  
CORRECT ONE



"I ONCE BELIEVED THAT BOLT  
WAS THE **PERFECT MAN**,  
LUNA...BUT I WAS **WRONG**

"HE **COULD**  
NOT **LOVE**.

"AND SO THERE WAS  
NOTHING HE **COULD**  
**LOSE**, REALLY

"KING BRIAN HAS LOST  
**EVERYTHING**.

"HIS WIFE  
HIS FRIENDS  
HIS FAMILY

"AND HE HAS  
BEEN ASKED  
TO WIELD A  
WEAPON MEANT  
TO **HEAL**, NOT  
DESTROY. A  
WEAPON NOT  
MADE BY  
HUMAN HANDS.  
YET HE HAS  
**SPILLED**  
BLOOD WITH  
THAT SAME  
WEAPON

"HOW HEAVY  
IT MUST BE

"IF I AM GOING TO BE  
QUEEN, I AM GOING TO  
HAVE TO **SHARE** IN HIS  
SORROW

"AND I **NEVER**  
LEARNED HOW  
TO DO THAT"





HOW ARE YOU TODAY, MR. JAMESON?



I'M DYING BUT I AM NOT, STRANGE.

NOTHING TO REPORT, LIKE ANYONE STUCK IN THIS PRISON YOU CALL A HOSPITAL.

YOU REQUESTED TO BE MOVED TO THIS FACILITY MR. JAMESON. YOU TELL ME.



IF I DIDN'T KNOW BETTER, I'D BLAME ALL THIS ON SPIDER-MAN.

THERE'S SOMEONE OUT THERE KILLING PEOPLE, OR AT LEAST FILLING UP YOUR HOSPITALS WITH PEOPLE...

...GOOD PEOPLE THAT NEVER FOUGHT IN THEIR UNDERWEAR.



DIDN'T KNOW BETTER?



YOU THOUGHT SPIDER-MAN WAS THE ONLY ONE I WAS WATCHING ALL THOSE YEARS.

I WATCHED ALL OF YOU.



I LISTENED AND COLLECTED AND COLLATED ALL THE STORIES, WHETHER THEY COULD BE SUBSTANTIATED OR NOT.


YOU DON'T BECOME PUBLISHER WITHOUT BEING THE BEST DAMN REPORTER FIRST.



TELL ME,  
THEN, WHO KILLED  
YOU?



MEPHISTO.  
THE ONE WE ALL  
THOUGHT WAS THE  
DEVIL.



NOW THAT HE  
KNOWS WHAT HE IS AND  
WHO HE IS NOT, HE DOESN'T  
HAVE TO ONLY TRY TO BLACKEN  
OUR SOULS, HE CAN DESTROY  
US **UTTERLY**.

BETTER  
THE DEVIL  
WE **KNEW**,  
STRANGE.



THIS IS  
A GRUDGE MATCH  
YOU SUPER HEROES  
STARTED **LONG**  
**AGO**.

STOP HIM.  
STOP HIM, BECAUSE YOU  
SURE AS HELL AREN'T DOIN'  
ANY GOOD HERE.



LOKI,  
GET THE  
OTHERS.



WE'VE NOW  
GOT **MORE** TO DO  
THAN JUST RESCUE  
CLEA FROM  
AGGARD.

"My childhood was a  
period of waiting for  
the moment when I  
could send everyone  
and everything con-  
nected with it to Hell."  
— Igor Stravinsky

# APPENDIX TO CHAPTER ONE

WRITTEN BY JIM KRUEGER

## REDWING

"Aaron? Is that you?"

"Hello, Wyatt."

"What's the Watchman of Earth doing here in the remains of Washington, D.C.?"

"What's a hero like Redwing, Wyatt, doing in a place where he can do no good?"

"Steve's dead, Aaron. Haven't I done enough good already?"

"Steve's death was not your fault. You weren't even there."

"Yeah. I wasn't there. And it wasn't my fault. I didn't know self-contradiction was part of your programming."

"Stop it, Wyatt. What you are doing here is something Steve would never have wanted."

"Why are you here?"

"I didn't come to see D.C., Redwing. I came to talk to you. To tell you how Captain America's death serves a purpose that he would want you to now fulfill in his absence."

"Why? Is there another army being formed that you need more dumb muscle for? Is there another banner you want me to wave while more of my friends die because I am not there to save them? While more heroes bite it so that I have less reasons to live than before?"

"No."

"Then what?"

"I wanted to tell you about my father, Abel Stack. About why he built me and what he wanted for me."

"Go on, Aaron, but you're wasting your time. I will not be moved. Steve Rogers is dead. And that is the end of it."



"Why does Steve's death have to be the end of you, the end of the good you could do? You tell me that you weren't there to save him. And I'm telling you that Steve's death was intended to save you along with the rest of mankind."

"I don't feel saved, Aaron. This is more like damnation. Go on, then. Tell me about how I've been saved."

"Like Steve Rogers, Wyatt, I was built to be a soldier, a thinking weapon to



be aimed at the enemies of the United States of America. I was built to fight enemies both foreign and domestic. But unlike Cap, I was not a symbol. I, like the rest of the entire X-series, was to be fully disposable in fact.

"But my father, the man that constructed and designed me, had another destiny in mind, one which meant that I would not be deconstructed when the X-series program was dissolved for lack of funding.

"My father didn't want me to fight. He wanted me to be human. He wanted me to know what it meant to love and be loved. He wanted me to know what it was like to be a part of humanity, to be a part of something instead of merely a collection of parts."

"You're making me misty here, Aaron. What's the point?"

"I was built with a self-destruct mechanism in my



assembly. When the X-series program was scrapped, I was also slated for destruction. But instead, my father chose to be destroyed himself. He chose death so I would not have to die."

"Your friend, Steve Rogers, wanted the same for you as my father did for me."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"You weren't listening at Steve's funeral, Wyatt. You weren't thinking about what Steve gave his life for."

"He lost his life over another stupid cosmic crisis."

"That's so small a view of what happened, Wyatt. Mar-Vell's goal here upon Earth was to build an armory that he could use in the afterlife, not only to kill the being known as Death, but to create a place where mankind could go once it left this plane of mortality. Steve saw that. And he gave his life to make Death an antique concept, to make certain there was a place where we would go, where you would go when you die. Steve died making that a reality. He died so that we'd never have to be afraid of Death again. In many ways the super soldier of America helped to make a place for all those who died

in war in all of history. Steve died for this, Wyatt. He died for you. For all of us."

"So I've heard. But look around you, Aaron. This world's hospitals are full of people for whom death would be a comfort."

"Things are not as we expected them to be. Even the child Mar-Vell is confused."

"We're all confused. Are you really telling me that Steve died so that those he was preparing a way for could suffer for all time? Are you really asking me to join another crusade to save the world only to make it worse? The heroes gave Mar-Vell free rein to sell humanity into suffering. Look at Reed..."

"Reed?"

"Sure. Reed Richards calls Galactus, who I know is now his son Franklin Richards, to come and save the Earth. Franklin comes and kills something that was living at the core of the planet. And when he does, he endangers the planet by setting off its polarity."

"Reed's saved the Earth time and time again."

"Of course he has. Just like he's endangered it time and time again by his discoveries of races and beings from other realities that would never have known of Earth if Reed hadn't given them the keys to the planet in the first place."

"Reed needs you now, Wyatt. He is planning to undo what Mar-Vell's done. He doesn't know how yet, but he's going to try to help ease the suffering of mankind."

"That's just like him. Have you thought of what danger this attempt to now ease our suffering will cause?"

"Are you saying Reed should do nothing?"

"No. But, I'm afraid of a world with no enemies for Reed to fight. Think about all the things Reed invented and created and discovered in the midst of fighting Doom, the Skrulls, Namor, Puppet Man and all the rest of them. I'm afraid of how much his mind will conceive now that all the enemies are gone. Did you even wonder how much better the world was with Doom in it? Doom kept Reed occupied. He kept him busy. I'm afraid of what Reed will do without an enemy to face."

"Then there is only one thing you can do, Wyatt."

"Yeah, what's that?"

"Go to Reed. Help him. Give him perspective."

"You think I'll be able to do that? You've seen Reed's whole life, in ways I haven't. I couldn't give Steve perspective, and he died. If I even try to offer the same to Reed, he'll send me on some mission halfway across the world where I won't be able to stop him or his plans to save the world."

"But at least you'll have tried."

"Yes, Aaron. At least I'll have tried."

